

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ROME 003978

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DOT FOR EDDIE CARAZO

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ELTN](#) [EWWT](#) [EAIR](#) [OTRA](#) [IT](#) [ITALIAN](#) [POLITICS](#)

SUBJECT: ITALY TRANSPORT MINISTER LAMENTS POOR
INFRASTRUCTURE, MESSINA BRIDGE "NOW A REALITY"

Sensitive but Unclassified, not for public distribution, not
for Internet publication.

1. (SBU) Summary: In an introductory courtesy call with the Ambassador, Italian Minister of Infrastructure and Transport Pietro Lunardi criticized the poor state of Italy's infrastructure, and said the situation was holding back Italy's tourism industry. Lunardi was pleased with Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta's attendance at the November EU road safety ministerial. The Minister also pledge his continued support for port security and the Megaports program, though he said he had limited ability to push Megaports forward on his own. Lunardi reiterated his determination to move forward with the Messina Strait bridge and the Venice subway projects. He expressed concern, however, that a victory by the center-left in 2006 would lead to cuts in needed infrastructure programs. End summary.

Lack of Infrastructure Holding Tourism Back

2. (SBU) The Ambassador paid a courtesy call November 29 on Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation Pietro Lunardi. Lunardi opened the meeting by explaining that, while the importance of the tourism industry to Italy is well recognized, the link between infrastructure and tourism is not always appreciated. Italy is a "country of museums and gardens," Lunardi said, but Italy is doing a poor job of exploiting its unique attractions. The transport network functions poorly "both for us and for tourists." He said many of Italy's best tourist and archeological sites are not easily accessible by freeways and visitors are often forced to navigate tiny roads. Better road infrastructure is especially important for attracting more cruise ships. Cruise passengers, he said, must be able to move quickly from ports to sites inland and back again. Syracuse in Sicily, for example, has some of the best archeological sites in Italy, he observed, yet the port is "a disaster." Similar infrastructure problems are also affecting Sardinia, Lunardi added.

Pleased With Secretary Mineta's Visit

3. (U) Lunardi expressed great satisfaction with the November visit by Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta. He said he was pleasantly surprised when Mineta accepted his invitation to attend the EU road safety ministerial in Verona, Italy. The conference, Lunardi explained, was proposed during the Italian presidency of the EU and is now an annual event. Thirty eight transport minister attended the 2005 meeting.

4. (U) Road safety, Lunardi continued, is key for Italy and for the EU, where 160 people die each day in vehicle accidents. Lunardi commented that half of road deaths in Italy involve motorcyclists; and he said Italy should consider adopting a more strict, U.S.-style licensing system for motorcycle riders. An important topic of conversation at the Verona conference was the need for European Member States to start educating children at a young age about traffic safety.

Port Security

5. (SBU) The Ambassador asked Lunardi how to move forward with the Department of Energy's Megaports program. (Note: Megaports has made little headway in Italy, primarily because the Prime Minister's office has failed for well over a year to name a lead Italian agency. End note.) While obviously not very familiar with Megaports, Lunardi expressed support for the program, but said he could not move forward without consulting the rest of the government. Lunardi's chief secretary, Giovanni Paolo Gaspari, and his diplomatic

SIPDIS

advisor, Emilio Maraini, interjected that many agencies have a hand in Italian port security issues, including the Ministries of Transport, Interior, and (via control of the customs service and financial police) Finance. Lunardi suggested that the Ambassador could perhaps host a meeting

with the key GOI players to discuss a way forward.

16. (SBU) On other transport issues, Lunardi commented that the Container Security Initiative (CSI) was functioning well and that Italy is ahead of other EU members in implementing the program. Lunardi also mentioned recent airport security issues--namely, Italy's implementation of the TSA no-fly/selectee list--that raised privacy concerns at the EU level. Maraini stated that Italy had found an interim solution to implement USG data-sharing requirements and that this was functioning well.

Messina Bridge and Venice Subway

17. (SBU) The Ambassador noted that the GOI had provisionally awarded the project management contract for the Messina Strait Bridge to the U.S. engineering firm Parsons. (Note: This has not been announced publicly, pending a final review of documents submitted by Parsons. End note.) Lunardi expressed satisfaction that the GOI has succeeded in moving the Messina bridge project forward after decades of discussions. "It is now a reality," Lunardi pronounced.

18. (SBU) Lunardi also spoke at length about the proposed Venice subway project. He outlined his vision for a high-speed rail line from Turin that would link to the Venice regional subway system and Venice's Marco Polo airport. However, Lunardi also expressed concern that the subway plan, along with other key infrastructure projects championed by the current center-right government, would be in jeopardy, should the center-left win the 2006 general elections.

Bio Note

19. (SBU) Pietro Lunardi is a political independent and does not hold a seat in the Italian Chamber of Deputies. He is an engineer by training and in the early 1980s founded his own company, Rocksoil, Spa, that specializes in tunneling and underground construction. His enthusiasm for the Venice subway proposal can be explained, in part, by his extensive professional experience working on underground metro projects around the world. He is head of the Italian Tunnel Society and gained public prominence through his membership on several government panels and committees, including one formed to investigate the 1999 Mont Blanc tunnel fire.

SPOGLI